DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 008 EA 022 735

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TITLE Year Round Education: A Closer Look.
PUB DATE 11 Dec 90
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; Curriculum Design; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Futures (of Society); School Organization; *School Restructuring; *School Schedules; *Year Round Schools

ABSTRACT

The presently used school calendar is based in early agrarian society when children were needed as summer farm labor. Because the needs of the United States have changed, the school year format should be reconsidered. Year-round education (YRE) includes any change made in the school calendar that reorganizes the standard 180 day school year, allows for staggered attendance, or extends instruction up to 240 days. Motivation to implement YRE includes alleviation of overcrowding and strengthening of instructional programs. Students can be in a single track system with all in attendance or be divided into a multitrack system, each with its own instructional period and vacation. YRE systems now total 641 schools in 20 states, 90 percent of which are elementary schools in the high growth states (California, Utah, and Nevada). A number of plans have emerged, including 45-15, which divides the year into four 9-week sessions and a 15-day intersession for increased instruction or vacation; 60-20, which employs three 60-day instruction periods, with three 20-day intersessions; and 90-30, which is composed of two semesters and two vacations. Financial motives typically dominate YRE, as it brings more value to existing facilities. Social impacts include a decrease in juvenile delinquency. Academic improvement has been inconclusive. Analysis, judgment, planning, and leadership are essential elements in administrating a change. YRE is a sound alternative to relieve overcrowding and may provide improved educational opportunities. (18 references) (EJS)

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Year Round Education: A Closer Look

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EDU 748
Professional Paper
December 11, 1990

EA 022 735

Abstract

In our changing society, the format of the century old agrarian calendar has come into question. The year-round education (YRE) concept includes a number of approaches to reorganize the school year. Change in the school year has been inspired for a range of reasons, from improvement of instruction, to scheduling for the purpose of relieving over crowding. Significant attempts at YRE extend back to the turn of the century, but, generally diminished by the Second World War. Today, there is a rapid increase in the number of districts participating in a year-round plan. At the forefront are the Western states, who are in the midst of rapid population increases and consequently are experiencing stress on existing facilities.

Depending on the particular needs of a district, a number of YRE programs have emerged. In each, the school year is broken up into a number of periods or terms, punctuated by vacations or intersessions. Some plans rearrange the 180 day instruction time. The 45-15, 60-20, 60-15, 90-30, trimester, quarter, quinmester, five week five track, concept six, and flexible all year plans are examples of calendars in use. Single or multi-track variations are employed, depending on space and finance limitations. By manipulating the essential elements of school calendars, a district can create its own system to custom fit its needs.

Pros and cons of YRE programs center around financial, social, and academic concerns. Substantial savings have been estimated by schools using multi-track programs. Hidden costs might reduce these savings, however, traditional lifestyles are a source of conflict. Parents, teachers,and students involved in the program, however, generally favor it and the long-term social impact shows promise. Academically, opinions vary. Shortness of terms and creative use of intersession time, could have singificant potential, in terms of improved schooling for all levels of students.

If the need and climate for change exist, setting up a YRE program needs district commitment and must involve: teachers and staff, education professionals, local organizations and the community at large. Aspects of economics, equity and academics must be considered. Implementation concerns include: in service,curriculum adjustment, parent education, student guidance and public relations. No plan will meet everyones needs. In areas of rapid population growth, it can be a sound alternative in dealing with overcrowding. More importantly, the education of YRE is considerable when combined with creative approaches to instruction and program development.

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Introduction

The commonly used school calendar has its origin in an early agrarian society at a time when children were needed during the summer to work on the family farm. As our country's needs have changed radically, so too perhaps should the format of our school year be reconsidered. Year-round education (YRE) is a term that included any change in the school calendar that: reorganizes the standard 180 day school year so that learning is more continuous throughout the year, allows for staggered attendance of student groups to use available space efficiently or extends the instruction up to 240 days per year (Ballinger et al, 1987).

Motivation to consider changes involving calendar revision has come from several sources. The most common reason has been overcrowding in the schools of Western United States. Rapid enrollment increases have created a critical need for more instructional space. In some districts limits on spending due to bonding limits, tax propositions or rejected building proposals have encouraged school officials to look at funds, space and students creatively. In these situations YRE plans typically subdivide students into groups or tracks, each with a different instructional and vacation schedule. Multi-track systems do not generally have all students in attendance at one time and, therefore, relieve overcrowding.

Taxpayers have likened schools to industry and see the

present use of facilities as inefficient. According to Earl Gotshalk, of the Wall Street Journal, it makes little sense for a nation of undereducated citizens to have a quarter of a trillion dollar investment in school buildings used for one half the year (National Education Association, 1987, p.5).

Year round programs have been initiated by communities that feel that children have little constructive to do in extended summer periods. Others believe that stronger instructional programs result from more continuous instruction. In situations where space is not crucial, single track plans have resulted. These plans have all students in attendance at the same time.

Many educators see YRE as a panacea which will help school reformers achieve many of their objectives. They believe that these programs could benefit pupils of all abilities. Advocates see potential for uplifting the teaching profession and accomplishing all this while producing a fiscal advantage to the taxpayer as well. These many merits are questioned by others who claim evidence is sparse and inconclusive. Either way acceptance and implementation of year-round programs seem to be currently on the rise, therefore, requiring a closer look.

History and Present Status

Year round education was implemented as early as the nineteenth century for immigrant children in Buffalo,

Baltimore, Cincinnati, and New York (NEA, 1987). Serious efforts resulted from various social and economic interests in the early 1900's. Bluffton, Indiana in 1904 instituted a year-round program to increase and improve curriculum (Howell, 1988). Newark, New Jersey set out in the year-round direction to help immigrants with English and provide opportunities for acceleration, in 1912. Omaha, Nebraska set out in 1925 to offer continuous vocational training. Nashville wanted simply to improve education with its 1926 plan. In 1926, Aliquippa, Pennsylvania set up a program for improved space utilization.

Early failure of these programs was attributed to a range of factors. Students from the Nashville (and Omaha) programs were graduating too young to work or effectively attend college. Poor public relations were often a program's demise. In Aliquippa, for example, a multi-track quarter plan mandated a three month winter vacation for 25% of its students. Many programs failed as the result of reduced depression spending or faded with the onset of World War II.

Interest was renewed in the late sixties and early seventies as the result of mushrooming populations and limitations in some areas on school spending for school facilities. After some initiation and elimination of YRE programs, the concept is now gaining serious momentum. At the forefront of this growth is California. Here the total number of programs has increased by 112 new participating schools or 28.6% and 90,746 students from the 1988-89 year to the 1989-90 year alone (Brekke, 1989). Throughout the

United States year-round membership now totals 641 schools in 110 districts in 20 states (Goldman, 1990). Ninety percent of these districts are in the high growth states of California, Utah and Nevada. Of the schools involved 90% are elementary, 5% junior and middle school and 5% high school (Carvicdo and Goren, 1989).

The driving force for the renewed interest in YRE remains overcrowding due to increasing enrollment. In California enrollment projections have inflated to 200,000 new students per year (Brekke, 1989).

Other districts see the pre-airconditioning 19th century agrarian-based calendar an anachronism. The YRE advocates see the rational for calendar revision as the chance to enhance and improve the quality of education in their districts. Rearranging and or extending the school year it's believed, can extend opportunities for all students from "at risk" and disadvantaged to those that desire to accelerate and seek enrichment. Major goals cited in the Buena Vista Virginia school district YRE program, for example, included added enrichment, extended remediation, better facility utilization, decrease in dropout and adequate child care (Bradford, 1989). Whether as a solution to overcrowding or for program reform, YRE implementation seems to be a growing trend for the foreseeable future.

Year-round Plans

Depending on the particular needs of individual districts, a number of different YRE plans have emerged. Most realign the

school in a number of periods or terms followed by vacation periods or intersessions. Some make mandatory or optional extension of instruction time while many simply rearrange the common 180 day requirement.

The 45-15 arrangement is one of the more popular plans. Sometimes called the Valley View Plan, the 45-15 divides the year into four nine-week terms. Each term is a marking period which can be further divided into three three-week units. After students attend the nine week or 45 day period , they have a three week or 15 day intersession. This sequence repeats four times a year for a total of 180 days of instruction. Intersession periods may be used as vacation, to extend and enrich instruction or for remediation. Creative planning of of intersession could provide students with diverse off campus and interdisciplinary opportunities. Problems that arise around local and national holidays can be accomodated, for example, by using a 47-13 day sequence around a holiday. The 45-15 plan results in more continuous instruction with added optional time available. Vacations are evenly spaced, numerous and exist in each of the four seasons. Potential problems arise when schedules interfere with traditional family summer vacations. Also, there are more start up and endings than in the traditional calendar.

The 45-15 can be used in a multi-track format , as well as, a single track plan to help ease the stress of overcrowding on facilities. Using the same blocks of time, students are are divided into groups or tracks. With four tracks, for

example, staggering of time blocks can result in only three-fourths of the student population being in attendance at a time while one-fourth is on vacation. This effectively creates 25% more space and allows enrollment to rise to 125% of capacity with a minimum of crowding. Compared to expensive new construction, this measure can create capitol and operational savings. Teachers could potentially opt to be reassigned between tracks and thus lengthen their contract year. As with any multi-track plan, the 45-15 format may require extensive teacher movement in and out of classrooms and require storage. Care must be taken to schedule siblings in a manner that is compatible to the family unit.

For those critical of the short instruction and vacation periods in the 45-15, the 60-20 plan extends each. Using either a single or multi-track three 60 day instruction periods , 180 total days, punctuated by three 20 day intersessions. A hybrid of the 45-15 and 60-20 plans is the 60-15 plan. This is a compromise that can be employed by a multi-track district that wants students and faculty to share a common vacation.

A 90-30 variation is comprised of two semesters and two vacations. Traditional spring and holiday vacations are included in the calendar. Trimester plans use three 60 day instructional periods instead of two. Unlike the 60-20 plan, intersession lengths are more flexible.

The Atlanta or Quarter plan has been around since the the turn of the century. The year is divided into four 12-week periods, one for each season. Each quarter course

is its own separate entity and is complete at the end of the 60 day period. Sequential courses, therefore, are offered in each block. Three quarters equal 180 days of school and students may choose or be assigned to any three out of four quarters. An optional quarter may be chosen for enrichment, acceleration or remediation on or off campus. The optional quarter is typically the summer session and the plan has, therefore, more easily met with approval in communities that cling to the traditional 180 day arrangement.

The Quinmester plan is often employed at the secondary level. It requires attendance in four out of five interdependent terms. The school year may be extended to 220 days with typical vacation time running six weeks. The five track plan is an exclusively multi-track plan that requires students to attend four out of five 45-day terms. Its calendar includes a common three week summer vacation. The concept-six plan is typically a space saving multi-track program. Students attend four out of six 43 day terms. If students are divided into three groups, only two are in attendance at a time. This program, however, only yields 160 total days of instruction. If 180 days is desired, some adjustment such as extending the school day, overlapping sessions is required.

In situations where instruction can be individualized the flexible All-Year plan allows for several instructional options based on a 240 day framework. Students can attend all

240 days for extended learning opportunities, they can follow the traditional 180 day calendar or they can meet the 180 day requirement throughout the year as they choose. This plan would be a radical departure from the common format in terms of our structured curricula.

In the spirit of YRE reform there is no reason to adhere to any of the above schedules in the same dogmatic manner as we have the two-semester long summer system. Four variables are commonly manipulated to create new calendars: required attendance, number and times of vacation periods, number of tracks and the percentage of students in attendance at any given time (Howell, 1988). Using these variables, a good plan should first block out weekends and local and legal holidays. A careful study should reveal the potential impact of considered possibilities on the facility, staff, students and community at large. Adequate investigation should be taken to maximize educational opportunities. Also, time is needed for staff development. Any plan will have to fit into the system of State and local mandates and customs. While rethinking the school year, districts have an opportunity to custom-design a program and plan to suit their own unique needs.

Pros and Cons of YRE

Opinions of YRE vary in three general , but diverse, areas of concern: financial impact, social impact and academic impact. This naturally follows as YRE programs have been set

up with varying objectives. Financial interests have typically dominated reasons for instituting calendar change. In general, year-round use of our school buildings achieves a better value for our capital investment. Many capital and overhead costs are fixed since school plants exist and are equipped.

Multi-track systems especially maximize the utilization of these pre-existing facilities. The middle-sized Oxnard, California school district estimates a $10,000,000 savings is possible over a four-year period (Ballinger,et al 1987). The National Association for Year-round Education estimates that $25,000,000,000 could be saved in education costs over the next 20 years if there is significant implementation of YRE (Brekke, 1990). Reduced vandalism has been noted as well in buildings in continual use (Ballinger, et al 1987). Early graduation of accelerated students can produce significant savings. Remediation replaced repetition in the Buena Vista, Virginia district for only 47 students saved an estimated $149,061 in 1988 alone (Bradford, 1989).

Initial expense of set up and renovations such as providing increased storage or installing air conditioning can be costly. Although many costs are fixed, employees that work longer will have to be paid more. More time in school means more wear and tear on the facility and less time for large scale cleaning and maintenance. If temporary measures of efficient building use result in postponing inevitable bonding for construction, higher costs could result.

When considering financial benefits many variables have to be considered.

The social impact of YRE effects students, educators, families, and the community at large. Students involved in a year-round plan perceive education like real life, as continuous. Shorter instruction-vacation cycles reduce burnout and rejuvinate student learning. Without extended breaks the need for in depth review diminishes. Early studies indicate that students, as well as, their teachers and administrators preferred YRE to conventional schedules (Young and Berger, 1983). Flexible schedules and creative curriculum were credited with some of this favorable opinion. More recently as well, composite studies that measured pupil attitude of YRE in and out of school reveal generally positive attitudes of students involved (Christie, 1989).

In other studies teachers have found year-round programs equal or superior to traditional programs in terms of overall flexibility, student discipline and ease of providing remedial services (NEA, 1987). Recommendation for continuation of the Buena Vista Plan ran as high as 92% in favor from the regular high school faculty (Bradford, 1989).

Year-round school could give meaningful employment to teachers during intersessions and optional terms. Quality professionals given the opportunity to earn higher annual wages may not leave the teaching profession. This may prove

particularly important in light of anticipated future shortages of high-caliber teachers. Some rescheduling with colleges and universities may be necessary to coordinate intersessions and continuing education programs for teachers.

Administrators have noted problems in lack of support in the form of training and financial aid for YRE (Young and Berger, 1987). Trouble in scheduling and lack of down time for planning and personal leaves are also potential problems. On the positive side, principals polled were pleased to note less fatigue and higher morale among students and faculty. In addition, there is the perception that teacher absences are fewer and that retention of curricula is better in year-round programs (Christie , 1989).

There has been in our society, a drastic change away from rural to urban lifestyles. There is a substantial increase in women in the labor force, children born out of wedlock and single parent families. This has resulted in a dramatic increase of unsupervised teens and latchkey children. These children spend a great deal of time, especially in extended vacations, in unstructured play and watching T.V. Wasted time and deliquency often result. Authorities have noted a decrease in juvenile deliquency in YRE systems, and parents of students involved in these programs, favor the year-round concept (NEA, 1987).

Lifestyle changes can be the source of the most social conflict. Traditional vacation times and summer jobs may

have to be adjusted. Different vacation schedules may prove rewarding in terms of seasonal variety and off-season rates may be rewarding. As students enter the work force at different times the flow of employees is more steady and employers see workers as more reliable (C. Ballinger, Personal Communication, March , 1990).

Data is inconclusive in regards to adademic achievement for year-round schools in general. Berar and Young (1983), found no comparative difference between year-round and traditional systems. The Buena Vista System found an increase in SRA achievment scores, improved attendance and a decline in dropout rates (Bradford 1990). University of California studies of achievement scores showed year-round schools outperformed traditional systems especially for students coming from disadvantaged or non-English speaking backgrounds (Gitlin, 1988).

The nature of shorter terms and frequent breaks of many programs create potential for improved learning. Shorter vacations improve retention and reduce the amount of review needed. In addition, time for school start up and course schedule changes are cut drastically after short breaks (C. Ballinger, personal communication, March , 1990). Unlimited educational potential is contained in the productive use of the vacation or intersession time. Since students learn at different rates it follows that some may use part of that intersession time for remediation. This might reduce the

cumulative failure that precipitates dropout by allowing less advantaged students to catch up. Even if a term needs to be repeated it certainly makes sense not to allow failure to perpetuate through an entire year. Other students might take advantage of this time for enrichment, field experiences, local and interdisciplinary projects, community work, and work study. Areas of personal interest could be pursued during these intersessions. Teachers might use some of this time for workshops, curriculum planning and related professional growth.

Administrating Change

Analysis, judgement, planning and leadership are essential elements in setting up a YRE program. The need and climate for change and clear identification of needs is requisite for this type of reform. Teachers, administration and school board members must show interest and commitment to the change. The public needs to be involved early in the planning process so that they will have time to buy into the program. In service, visitations, information gathering and sharing help generate interest and understanding. A major objective is to move toward a program that will best suit the unique needs of the district.

A systematic decision-making process should consider advantages and disadvantages of various year-round programs in light of issues such as: quality, efficiency equity and community impact (Carriedo and Gowen, 1989). State policies, requirements and incentives must be considered. California,

for example, passed a bill that allocates an additional $150 per student involved in a year-round program (Gitlin, 1988). This type of allotment could help defer change over costs, additional facility wear and tear, or pay for added teaching time. Decisions should involve teacher organizations, youth agencies, government agencies, classified personal and parent teacher organizations.

After a plan is adopted, ample time must be alloted for successful implementation of the program. Curricula concerns must include sequence and course continuity, provisions for remediation and mini-courses. Staff inservice must accompany major revisions and teachers assigned to new courses must have the opportunity to retool and organize. Guidance personnel need ample time to inform, counsel and schedule students for the change. Parents must be kept up to date on calendar revisions and the new system of courses and credits that affect their children's schooling. New handbooks and informational meetings will help prepare the parents for the change. A well informed and participating public will most likely minimize conflict during the transition. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation will strengthen the program, help maximize its benefits and insure the program remains consistant with district's predetermined objectives.

Conclusion

Charles Ballinger, executive director of the National

Association for Year-round Education, claims that in terms of fiscal, academic and social parameters, year-round education has proven itself (1987). He goes on to ask if YRE were the norm , would anyone adopt a "new" calendar with a three month interruption? Interestingly the National Vocational Agricultural Teachers Association has endorsed 12 month instruction for an effective educational program over the calendar originally set up with agriculture in mind (Richardson, 1982).

Opponents to YRE claim evidence is inconclusive in terms of academic achievement and that savings may be only moderate in the long run. Part of the difficulty in assessing year-round programs is brought about by the diverse objectives under which individual programs are conceived. Data is often presented solely for the purpose of legitimizing use of multi-tracking for cost efficiency. The intent here is to illustrate that YRE does no academic harm and is a sound alternative compared to split sessions, overcrowding and expensive construction. In this regard multi-track YRE thus far seems to be an effective and promising alternative.

Of more interest and less tested, is the year-round concept conceived purely by a district's desire to increase and improve educational opportunities for its children. Single track systems are generally set up solely for this purpose. Of the national total only about 100 year -round schools are single track and 90% of these are East of the Mississippi away from the mushrooming population and high YRE activity (Gitlin, 1988).

Perhaps in these schools, where overcrowding is not such a pressing concern can YRE realize more of its full educational potential. Here innovative approaches to formal instruction time, as well as, creative intersession opportunities can yield the kind of actual benefits we would expect from continual and expanded educational programs. Although YRE started as part of a reform initiated in the last century we may find it is a significant part of school reform in the next.

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